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COMMENT	FILE	RETURN	
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Remarks:			
<p>FYI -- D/Pers response to several of the initial secretariat/clerical groups concerns.</p> <p>New group is working on a "Director's Note"</p> <p>STAT</p>			
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78-360

25 11 1978

STAT MEMORANDUM FOR: Special Assistant to the DCI

VIA : Acting Deputy Director for Administration

STAT FROM : Acting Director of Personnel

SUBJECT : Secretarial-Clerical Concerns

REFERENCE : Yourmemo for A/DDA dtd 22 Nov 77, same subject

1. In accordance with your request, we are forwarding our responses to several of the items raised by a representative group of secretarial-clerical employees in their meeting with the Director in October 1977.

2. The items included in this response concern the subjects of: Vacancy Notices, Training, Operational Support Assistants, Contract Wives and Secretarial-Clerical Career Service. The remaining subjects are undergoing further study and will be forwarded as soon as they are completed.

STAT



Att.

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ITEM B:

Secretarial-Clerical Career Service. The Director has received additional comments on this topic from a group of Agency women with whom he met recently. Support appears to be mixed, but would such a career service ensure more evenhanded treatment of all employees in this category and promote inter-Directorate transfers contributing to better utilization of personnel?

RESPONSE:

The establishment of formal Career Service and Career Sub-group secretarial and clerical panels is an important step toward improving the effectiveness of career development and management of a significant and essential element of the Agency's work force. The Director has raised this topic directly with the Director of Personnel, who has prepared an action paper in response.

On the basis of consideration of the several occupational specialities within the secretarial/clerical area and the particular needs of employees within these groups, it would appear that the career management of the senior secretarial group (GS-08 and above) can best be administered by centralization at the Career Service level. In those Career Services which have established Career Sub-groups (i.e., office level) the career management of secretaries GS-07 and below and all other categories of clericals regardless of grade can more effectively be handled at the Career Sub-group level.

The guidelines relative to establishing such panels will include a uniform policy statement that would limit senior executive offices to a choice of secretaries at the grade or not more than one grade level below that of the position to be filled.

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ITEM C:

Vacancy Notices. Several of the groups meeting with the Director have complained about the ineffectiveness of the vacancy notice system. Many individuals said they had never seen such a notice. The Director would appreciate a summary of how the system is supposed to work, as well as suggestions on its improvement. Would a mandatory distribution of vacancy notices be practical and ensure that all employees have the opportunity to see such information?

RESPONSE:

The Agency-wide vacancy notice system was implemented in 1973 and was designed as a voluntary system to promote optimum use of existing manpower resources and to make information about assignment opportunities available to as many employees as possible. It is intended to complement the career service personnel development system. Components may, at their discretion, advertise within the component only, within the Directorate only, Agency-wide, or all three in that order. The grades of positions advertised range from GS-04 to GS-15 and include some contract, part-time and Wage Board. The use of the system by component managers has increased, from 67 notices in 1973 to 241 in 1976. The number of employees applying for vacancies also has increased from 225 in 1973 to 1,437 in 1976.

When a decision is made that a vacancy should be advertised Agency-wide, components prepare notices and disseminate them to approximately 75 mailing points within the Agency. Normally, there is a two-week deadline for application; however, many deadlines are extended and some are published with "open" dates. Interested and qualified employees submit their applications either through their own personnel officers to the Office of Personnel, or directly to the advertising component. The components then deal directly with the personnel officer of the component to arrange necessary interviews. When a selection is made, the component deals directly with the employee's component to arrange release dates. Employees who are not selected are notified in writing by the component or the Professional Placement Branch, Office of Personnel.

A review of the system was undertaken by the Office of Personnel in 1976 with a view toward improving and refining it, particularly with regard to the complaints about "preselection" and lack of circulation of the notices. In that review, components advised that notices were made available to their employees either by posting them in a central location, circulating them to sections, or to each employee, or by a combination of all three. In addition, each component maintains a file containing current vacancy notices for review by their employees,

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Instructions for applying. A listing of notices is posted at least monthly on seven official bulletin boards in Agency buildings. Pertinent facts which might affect an employee's decision to apply are included in the listing to the extent that security considerations allow. In order to assist the Library and the components in keeping their books up-to-date, OP/PPB provides them with the monthly listing of active notices and at least a bimonthly listing of closed notices.

The conclusion of our 1976 review was that, aside from some procedural and record-keeping changes, little in the system needed to be corrected. It appears that whatever flaws exist lie not with the system, but with those who are responsible for implementing it and their attitude towards their responsibility for personnel management. Once the notices leave the Office of Personnel, we have no control over the distribution within individual offices. With circulation of notices the primary complaint since the program began, we have considered several options in this area, including employee suggestions for improvement and found them to be not significantly better than the current system to warrant their adoption.

a. A "mandatory"-distribution system, if one could be established, would probably be helpful to employees but would be unenforceable, costly, and possibly incompatible with career development programs within components.

b. A computerized system whereby employees could obtain information on vacancies from strategically located terminals would be too costly to establish and maintain, given the small number of positions involved and the applicability of the notices to a relatively small portion of the Agency. (More than half of the notices are for clerical vacancies and would apply to approximately 28% of the Agency population. When you consider that 47% of the clerical notices are at the GS-06 and below level, the percentage of applicability is even lower.) In addition, it is possible that, unless a print-out were available, the time spent by employees in copying information from a terminal would soon become an annoyance factor to employees.

c. A "dial-a-vacancy" system, similar to the one currently in use by Employee Activities Branch to announce various activities, would also be inefficient. With an average of about 20 vacancy notices active at any one time, much time would be spent on the telephone to get oral information of a position of interest. Again, the lack of a print-out which the employee could peruse at his/her leisure, would probably soon become an aggravation because employees would continue to call the advertising component for additional information, as they do now, and have to write it down for their own reference. To establish separate telephone lines for individual offices, or grades, types, or locations of jobs, would seem, for the small number of positions involved, to amount to an expensive "overkill".

d. Publication of one copy of each notice for each employee or even one for six employees would be expensive, given the relatively limited applicability. In addition, unless a priority for printing and distribution from the Office of Logistics were given for vacancy notices, the cost of xeroxing even 3,000 copies approximately 20 times per month would be time-consuming, and expensive.

It is obvious that a listing on seven bulletin boards does not reach many employees--many do not read the boards, nor even know of their location or existence. It is also obvious that not all managers and supervisors are willing to "lose" their good employees for the good of the employee's career or the Agency in general and thus the circulation of notices is subject to the whims of individual supervisors.

It would appear that if all vacancy notices were regularly posted on central bulletin boards, and all employees so notified, the burden of proof would then be on the employee to pursue the notices rather than identifying either legitimate or bogus reasons for non-distribution.

Lacking enough real evidence that circulation of notices is the major problem it is said to be, and thus demanding one of the expensive systems discussed, it is our suggestion that the Director express in strong terms to the Deputies, and they to their Office Heads, his concern for the integrity of the system, and the need to insure that all employees have access to the notices. A combination of that action and the regular posting of notices on central bulletin boards should dispel much of the chronic dissatisfaction previously expressed about the vacancy notice system. Employees should also be informed that career counselors can assist them with information useful to their career planning.

ITEM E:

Training. The secretarial-clerical group strongly supported improved training for new employees. What training is now given to new secretarial-clerical employees? What are the pros and cons on the type of training proposed in the attached agenda paper?

RESPONSE:

Because secretarial-clerical employees are selected on the basis of skills they possess, there is no formal skills training offered within the Agency for new secretarial-clerical employees. The Agency does support external training for the purposes of acquiring new or enhanced skills.

The Office of Training (OTR) did provide instruction in typing, shorthand, telephone techniques, correspondence and general office procedures to secretarial-clerical employees from the early 1950's through 1973. This instruction was eliminated as a consequence of personnel reductions and OTR is not currently able to provide such training within its present personnel ceiling.

The Office of Training's experience with the earlier training program suggests that it can be done more effectively on a decentralized basis, as much of the material to be covered varies a great deal from office to office. This pertains particularly to correspondence and office procedures. As an alternative to the recommendation, therefore, it is suggested that new secretarial and clerical personnel, whether entering on duty from outside the Agency or through internal reassignment, receive instruction on office protocol, telephone techniques, correspondence, and similar procedures from a knowledgeable senior secretary in the office, division, or staff to which the new employee is assigned.

We fully support the recommendation that the Director include in his "Notes from the Director" encouragement to Agency managers to enroll their secretarial and clerical personnel in appropriate Agency training courses. There are many courses of Instruction available to secretarial and clerical personnel, all designed to make them more effective in the service of the Agency.

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ITEM F:

Operational Support Assistants. How recently have these positions been classified? Are they at a level commensurate with the duties and responsibilities required?

RESPONSE:

All of the Operational Support Assistant positions have been reviewed within the past five years. Since we do not normally review an occupational group separately from an organizational review, these positions were studied as part of the overall DDO surveys.

Such positions range in grades from GS-07 to GS-09--the grades taking into account the overall responsibilities assumed by the incumbents. Positions with duties and responsibilities warranting grades in the GS-10 and above range would be titled other than Operational Support Assistant and would be filled by qualified professional officers.

The result of our surveys of Operational Support Assistant positions is that the existing level appears proper, that is, 37 GS-07's, 32 GS-08's, and 20 GS-09's.

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ITEM G:

Contract Wives. Comments on this subject have been received from others, too. What effort do we make to assign husband/wife teams to the same post? What are other agencies (State, USIA) doing in such cases?

RESPONSE:

When husbands and wives attempt to pursue individual careers, even within the same agency, some problems are inevitable, particularly when one is assigned to a post outside the headquarters area. The Agency attempts to alleviate such problems without doing violence to the interests of its other employees. In order to protect the status of the employed spouse who might not have the opportunity for employment in the new geographic area, the Agency in 1972 established a policy whereby the spouse would be authorized up to three years leave without pay (LWOP) to permit her/him to accompany the husband/wife to the new post. During this period of LWOP the employee earns six months retirement credit for each calendar year, without contribution, and receives a full year of health and Federal life insurance, without payment of premiums.

Prior to the 1972 policy, it was normal practice to grant 90 days LWOP to employees accompanying spouses to assignments outside the Headquarters area to allow for travel to the new post and contract employment, if available, without a break in service. The DDO does have a policy, although exceptions are granted, against the contract employment of the spouse of GS-14 and above officers at overseas posts, and there may have been some resignations prior to 1972 as a result. The three year LWOP policy now negates the need for resignation in these cases. Apart from this specific policy, however, there has never been a requirement to resign if there was any possibility of employment at the post in staff or contract status.

The woman employee in the Agency is treated as an individual, and even when she elects to be a "wife" and accompany her husband to an assignment (or alternatively when a husband elects to accompany a wife to her assignment) the spouse is given every consideration for continued employment.

It is true that spouse employees are often placed under contract at salaries lower than their headquarters GS grade. There is no legal way of resolving that situation since the station can employ only at the grade of the available position. It is not always possible for the Agency to provide exactly the job each spouse employee desired, but, within the statutory limitations, position ceiling restraints, and good personnel management practices, all employees are treated as equitably as possible for assignment and career development.

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While the Operations Directorate makes every effort to identify a staff position for the employee accompanying a spouse to an assignment outside the headquarters area, there has been no effort to create the husband/wife team. In most instances, the combination is operations officer/secretary, and the timing of assignments cannot always fit the pattern of availability of positions for both members of the family. At small isolated posts this is sometimes easier to achieve, given the difficulty of such assignments for single persons. These situations, however, are not usually common in a career, hence there is no identified requirement for a large number of this combination of husband/wife team.

State and USIA also provide the three year leave without pay grant for the married employee accompanying a spouse to an overseas assignment. The officer/secretary combination is not as common in State as it is in CIA, probably because the State or USIA officer is normally assigned outside the United States for the major part of a 20-25 year career and the secretary-wife does not maintain a "career" at the successive posts. The more common couple situation is the officer/officer, with one taking the three year LWOP for one assignment, the other taking it the second time around. The problem of two careers has been solved in some instances by the assignment of the two individuals to different posts; State frequently has more posts within a country than CIA does, often making this a workable solution for the employee couple. Contacts at the State Department advise that individuals pursuing the course of alternate LWOPs grant their progression cannot be in the same pattern as the individual who is available for assignment on a full-time basis over the 20-25 year career.

Other areas of concern noted in the Agency Secretarial Group Agenda:

a. The Office of Personnel is reexamining with the Office of Security the requirement for a new security clearance on return to staff status from contract employment.

b. In connection with restoring the original GS grade to the contract wife and insuring no loss of periodic in-step longevity, we can state that every effort is made to return the individual to duty in the grade formerly held, and our experience is that this had been done in most cases. It cannot be guaranteed, however, as Agency personnel and position ceiling impose restrictions on availability of positions and grade thereof. Pay scales are related to duties and responsibilities, and the grade of reappointment must necessarily be related to the position identified for the individual. Approval of PRA status is governed by the provisions of HR 20-17 which are not usually applicable in return to duty situations. Within-grade increases (periodic in-step longevity) are governed by law and can be granted only to individuals who qualify by the level of their job performance, a basis missing if the individual is on LWOP in excess of statutory limits, had no employee status, or was working at a lower grade.

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c. Any contract written for a period in excess of one year, or for an individual converting from staff status without a break in service, is required by law to include retirement benefits, CSR or CIARDS, providing both longevity credit and contributions to retirement funds. Contract employees, however, often elect to take a contract written for a shorter period in order to obtain Social Security coverage.

d. Upon return of the contract employee to headquarters and to staff status, the official personnel material from the field is forwarded to headquarters and is included in the individual's official personnel file, making the OPF the complete record of staff and contract employment.

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